

After Farida Khanum & Ghalib

Softened sunlight sieves through wicker blinds.
My fingertips trace light woven into shadow
over your bare skin.
The rising steam from twin cups
echoes the fog drifting over distant hills
and Farida Khanum's sonorous voice lilts from the vinyl –

Yun hi pehlu mein baithe raho.

I want to translate it for you;
keep sitting close to me like you are now.

The sarangi hums and cries as it meanders
between the silvery notes of the flute;
a language you do understand.

Quickened breaths write a new verse
between longing Urdu lyrics.

We lie with backs stretched
on the cold concrete of the *aangan*
that separates the house from the front yard.
The branches of the mahua canopy above us
like a torn green stocking.
A red glossy beetle crawls up your arm
over a crooked path of freckles
to irreverently claim what is mine.
I flick her towards the stirring wind,
which carries her into the delicate folds of a hibiscus
Your voice drifts over the lines
of our favourite Ghalib verse –

*Passion can't be tamed;
nor ignited, or smothered
merely by human will.*

As light drains from the sky,
words can no longer hide behind shadows.
In the gentle glow of the evening lamps
we write more poetry.